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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"The Skin of Our Teeth" opened Wednesday, November 18th, at the Plymouth Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"The Skin of Our Teeth"

NEW YORK SUN
November 19, 1942

'The Skin of Our Teeth,' A Lively Joke, Is Offered At the Plymouth

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THORNTON WILDER turns handsprings through human history in "The Skin of Our Teeth," which opened at the Plymouth last evening. He celebrates the persistence of man against all odds in a play which is part circus and part comically mad allegory, a play which jumbles all times and all places together, introduces a New Jersey couple who have been married 5,000 years and throws off sparks like a pin wheel. "The Skin of Our Teeth" is funny and tonic; it is one of the theater's lively jokes.

The author has a serious regard for Man but he does not breathe heavily about it. He has arranged that Talluiah Bankhead, having a singularly radiant evening, shall break things up with casual, scathing asides to the audience. He incorporates a small dinosaur and a very small mammoth in his cast; he provides that the flood shall interrupt frisky goings-on at Atlantic City. He uses funny lantern-slides to depict the advance of the ice age and he has Mr. Antrobus report by telegraph that he has just invented the wheel and is getting along fine with the alphabet. But he does not forget to say that the human animal is a tough, indestructible thing which hangs on to life by the skin of his teeth and comes doggedly up out of every abyss.

Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus of Excelsior, N. J. —where they live in a house which collapses when Miss Bankhead dusts it—are Mr. and Mrs. Human. They are also Adam and Eve; their son, Henry, is also Cain and bears his mark. Henry is also the spirit of uncontrolled violence, and probably of human hate. In the first act Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus survive the ice age and part company with dinosaur and mammoth. They protect Homer and Moses and the Misses Muse, E., T. and M. They are helping to celebrate at the Mammals Convention in Atlantic City in the next act, when the flood comes. Mr. Antrobus is almost trapped by Miss Bankhead, who had become Lilith. They escape with the animals and Lilith, whose fate it is always to have to go back to the kitchen. And in the last act they pull their house together again, after a war which may be this war and just before the curtain falls the play starts all over. But the audience can go away then. The Antrobuses have saved their home once more, and the new child, and the books which tell all that man knows of what he might be. Philosophers go over their heads like stars, telling the few things man has learned; the Antrobuses themselves are full of fine new plans for a fine new world. They've got their teeth in again.

It is not profound, nor does it pretend to be. It is comedy, outrageous and unexpected and full of tricks. Rather often the gay mood is not fully sustained; once or twice the author can be detected giving nonsense a worried shove. But by and large "The Skin of Our Teeth" seems to me a fresh and delightful jest.

It could hardly be better acted. Miss Bankhead, as may have been guessed, runs through it brightly, sparkling wherever she is. Florence Eldridge and Fredric March catch the shifting moods of their characters with sensitive skill; Florence Reed, in a brief scene as an Atlantic City fortune teller, brings a character to curious life with easy certainty; Montgomery Clift plays the part of Cain with proper violence. And there is excellent acting in almost all the small parts of the very large cast. The whole production, including Albert Johnson's scenery, is animated and inventive.

'THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH'

A comedy in three acts by Thornton Wilder; directed by Elia Kasan; settings by Albert Johnson; costumes by Mary Percy Schenck; presented at the Plymouth Theater on November 18, 1942, by Michael Myerberg. The cast:

Announcer	Morton DaCosta
Sabina	Talluiah Bankhead
Mr. Fitzpatrick	E. G. Marshall
Mrs. Antrobus	Florence Eldridge
Dinosaur	Remo Buffano
Mammoth	Andrew Ratousheff
Telegraph Boy	Dickie Van Patten
Gladys	Frances Heflin
Henry	Montgomery Clift
Mr. Antrobus	Fredric March
Doctor	Arthur Griffin
Professor	Ralph Kellard
Judge	Joseph Smiley
Homer	Ralph Cullinan
Miss E. Muse	Edith Faversham
Miss T. Muse	Emily Lorraine
Miss M. Muse	Eva Mudge Nelson
Usher	Stanley Prager
Usher	Harry Clark
Girl } Drum	Elizabeth Scott
Girl } Majorettes	{ Patricia Riordan
Fortune Teller	Florence Reed
Chair Pusher	Earl Sydnor
Chair Pusher	Carroll Clark
Convener	Stanley Weede
Convener	Seumas Flynn
Convener	Aubrey Fassett
Convener	Stanley Prager
Convener	Harry Clark
Convener	Stephan Cole
Broadcast Official	Morton DaCosta
Defeated Candidate	Joseph Smiley
Mr. Tremayne	Ralph Kellard
Hester	Eulabelle Moore
Ivy	Viola Dean
Fred Bailey	Stanley Prager

And don't let the term "allegory" frighten. "The Skin of Our Teeth" is as easy to enjoy as a circus. No home work is required.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 19, 1942

'Skin of Our Teeth' Fantastic Satire on a Cockeyed World

"The Skin of Our Teeth," fantastic comedy by Thornton Wilder. Produced by Michael Myerberg at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, Nov. 18, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I COULDN'T promise that you will enjoy "The Skin of Our Teeth," knowing nothing of your reactions to fantastic comedy, but I can say, with conviction, that I think you will be sorry if you do not see it.

It is quite sure to prove the supreme novelty of this theatre season, and is certain to be generously debated. Furthermore it is excitingly staged and extremely well acted by a cast that is headed by Talluiah Bankhead, Fredric March, Florence Eldridge and Florence Reed.

As for its content, that is largely a matter between you and the author, Thornton Wilder. It is one of those antic satires into which you can read as many meanings and explanations as please you. Into it Mr. Wilder has tossed a few eloquent observations, bits of wisdom, suggestions of symbolism and many, many words.

Author Wilder's Idea

So far as it is possible successfully to clarify the story, the management obliges with a program note which reads, in part:

"The Antrobuses have survived fire, flood, pestilence, the seven-year locusts, the ice age, the black pox and the double feature, a dozen wars and as many depressions. They have run many a gamut, are as durable as radiators, and look upon the future with a disarming optimism. Ultimately bewitched, befuddled and becalmed, they are the stuff of which heroes are made—heroes and buffoons. They are true offspring of Adam and Eve, victims of all the ills that flesh is heir to. They have survived a thousand calamities by the skin of their teeth, and Mr. Wilder's play is a tribute to their indestructibility."

It is, in other words, a satiric survey of the history of mankind, starting with the ice age and coming down to the last temporarily completed war.

George and Margaret Antrobus represent the heads of an average American family who find themselves "at grips with a destiny sometimes sour, sometimes sweet."

Down the Ages

Through a thousand reincarnations they suffer the slow progress, and glory in the new triumphs the race has been able to consummate. They are always a little comic in their ignorance, and a little pathetic in their determination to survive, even as you and I.

Even though her son is that son of Eve who slew his brother Abel, Margaret Antrobus fights for him and his salvation down to the war in which he became the Adolph Hitler of his day.

Even though her husband is that restless Adam who looks covetously upon the sheer hosiery and red lips of fancier women, Margaret stands understandingly by and drags him back into the home.

Once, after a war, she is also compelled literally to pull the home itself together, that there may again be a roof over the family's heads and a hearthstone around which its befuddled members may gather.

By the Sea Waves

There is a wildly amusing scene at Atlantic City with Bingo parlors, a secret order convention, and a fortune teller's booth. At the booth Florence Reed presides as a seeress who knows all and tells little.

It is the individual characterizations from which you will probably get the most satisfaction. Miss Bankhead has the flashiest part, and plays it past the hilt.

A fine comedienne emerges from the solemn, sentimental and emotional parts that Talluiah has played. She is Sabina, the Antrobuses' housemaid, the eternal Lilith, the temptress. Her philosophical observations concerning both world history and the play Mr. Wilder has worked out of it are rich and rare. I trust she will speak them a little less nervously and a little more clearly tonight.

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge are a perfect choice to play the heads of the first family. Miss Eldridge also is temporarily a changed woman, giving Maggie Antrobus a robust force and a clear reading that helps vastly with the Wilder text. Mr. March, as is his custom, steps confidently into the role of Antrobus as though it were especially tailored to his measure.

Miss Reed has but one scene as the fortune teller, but gives it color and authority. She, too, will be reading better tonight. The children are well played by Montgomery Clift and Frances Heflin. You can, if you look quick, catch a glimpse of Andrew Ratoushceff, the gifted midget actor of the World's Fair.

The settings are well fitted to the text by Albert Johnson. Elia Kasan has directed well, but permitted his troupe frequently to run away with the text, evidently in a desire to "keep it snappy." Last night's audience laughed a lot and cheered a little.

"The Skin of Our Teeth"

NEW YORK POST
November 19, 1942

"The Skin of Our Teeth" Arrives at the Plymouth

By WILELLA WALDORF

ON ITS pre-Broadway tour, Thornton Wilder's latest theatrical effort, "The Skin of Our Teeth," seems to have stirred up quite a controversy. Out-of-town audiences are said to have been either bored and baffled, or awe-struck and fascinated with its cosmic significance.

The management, a little nervous, felt it necessary to print a program note at the Plymouth Theatre last night explaining that "The Skin of Our Teeth" is a comedy about George Antrobus, his wife and two children, and their general utility maid, Lily Sabina, all of Excelsior, N. J.; that Mr. Antrobus is the average American, and that he and his family have survived fire, flood, pestilence, the seven-year locusts, the ice age, the black pox and the double feature, a dozen wars and as many depressions, by the skin of their teeth, and still look upon the future with a disarming optimism. The play is a tribute to their indestructibility. That's what the management says.

Maybe so. It seems more probable, however, that "The Skin of Our Teeth" is actually less abstruse. Mr. Wilder must simply have decided one night that if Olsen and Johnson can get away with what they've been doing in the theatre all these years, there is no good reason why Thornton Wilder shouldn't turn out something of the kind, with a dash of philosophy tossed in here and there to remind us that he has, after all, a reputation for profound and lofty thinking.

The Ice Age in Excelsior, N. J.

Since Mr. Wilder is at present an officer in the armed forces, he is unable to take part in the festivities in person, but Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March, and Florence Eldridge tear around the stage playing with dinosaurs and mammoths during the Ice Age, attending conventions in Atlantic City, and surviving the latest war.

Now and then Miss Bankhead gets fed up with the play and tells the audience so, and the stage manager comes out and reprimands her. It is all very chummy and bears a strong resemblance to "Hellzapoppin" and the allied arts, except that Mr. Wilder keeps giving his characters Biblical names, and quotations from Plato and Spinoza are intoned in the last act.

Like all madcap divertissements of its kind, "The Skin of Our Teeth" begins to grow a bit hum-drum after the novelty has worn off. The brassy foursome that provides entr'acte "music," the scenery that disappears when Lily Sabina tries to dust it, Mr. Antrobus's singing telegram to his spouse as the Ice Age descends, the antics of the "conveeners" on the Atlantic City Boardwalk, all provide their share of entertainment for a while, but actually it is Miss Bankhead's Lily Sabina who does most to keep "The Skin of Our Teeth" from disintegrating into a waggish and rather heavy-footed bore.

Miss Bankhead as a Disgruntled Actress

Miss Bankhead is supposed to be an actress named Miss Somerset who is playing the part of Lily Sabina in "The Skin of Our Teeth" against her better judgment, because she needs a job. Every little while she becomes so overwhelmed with the futility of it all that she stops the show to protest. Even when she isn't actually refusing to speak her lines, she talks to the audience a good deal.

"I hate this play and every word in it," she remarks early in the evening, and pauses to wonder what has happened to the theatre since the dear old days of "Peg O' My Heart," "Smilin' Through" and "The Bat."

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge give effective performances as Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, Miss Eldridge providing a very amusing satirical sketch as a club woman making a speech at the Atlantic City convention, and Florence Reed as a Boardwalk fortune teller entertains the audience with a dissertation on the ease with which she can foretell the future—it's the past that is baffling—but it is Miss Bankhead's irreverent interruptions that provide the merriest moments of the evening.

"There's that dinosaur on the front lawn again," she remarks to Miss Eldridge, adding an apology to the audience for ever getting mixed up in such a play.

"I don't understand a word of this," she confides, busily flicking her feather duster over the fidgety scenery, the nervous furniture, and Mr. Antrobus's prehistoric pets.

No Profound or Cosmic Significance

Mr. Wilder goes to some trouble to indicate that the Antrobuses are actually Adam and Eve, and that their son, an aggressive youth handy with a sling-shot, is named Cain. Moses comes into the first act, and there is a good deal of rebuilding-the-world-after-the-war talk later on, with overtones from the philosophers just out the window. This may set some people a-worrying about allegorical significance and kindred subjects, but "The Skin of Our Teeth" actually is neither a profound nor particularly impressive drama.

It is merely a stunt show with everything tossed into it that the author could dream up. Like all wacky extravaganzas it doesn't always come off, and it is occasionally rather dull, but the evening is saved by some good performances in the leading roles, and especially by the fact that Miss Bankhead is on hand to chatter and flounce her way through the ages, complaining bitterly to the audience every thousand years or so.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 19, 1942

The Skin of Our Teeth Opens at the Plymouth

By BURTON RASCOE

IN The Skin of Our Teeth, which opened last night at the Plymouth, Thornton Wilder retold the history of mankind in the riotous terms of Olsen & Johnson. Everybody (I guess: I didn't see any sourpusses around) had a glorious time, including the cast. And Tallulah Bankhead had the time of her life in the first part she has ever had that has allowed her to be the sardonic wit she is off stage and that has given full scope to her great natural sense of comedy.

Thornton Wilder has learned much about the theater since those days when he wrote the very literary plays called The Trumpet Shall Sound and The Long Christmas Dinner, wherein he was precious, oracular and obscure. To drag in Miss Bankhead's famous quip on first beholding Masterlinck's The Blue Bird, there is less in those plays than meets the eye—even on the printed page when you study them in your library. Mr. Wilder has, indeed, learned enough about the theater to know that it is a medium of entertainment first and of instruction and edification afterwards; and so, in his new play, he kids the life out of his pseudo-philosophic manner and kids life into a play that is genuinely philosophical.

A Rebuke to Prophets of Doom

In taking a tip from Hellzapoppin', he has learned that he can slip over on the audience the most serious message that he or anybody else can give in these pessimism-inducing times without having the audience walk out on him and the critics asking rhetorically in their critiques: "What's this hogwash all about?" In various ways Miss Bankhead has asked that same question so many times (and with such hilarious response from the audience each time) during the first act, that by the time the curtain goes down for the intermission you are devoutly hoping that the author won't go serious on you in the next act and pull one of these what-is-its of the drama which is known as a fantasy, and usually is something dreary and unpleasant or so sweet you feel like crying for a shot of insulin. You are hoping, indeed, that you won't ever know what the play is about, being quite content that it should keep on being crazy and funny.

The message of The Skin of Our Teeth is a rebuke to our contemporary prophets of doom and an encouraging reminder that since the first man and his wife appeared on earth he and their descendants have, as the program note seriously understates, "survived fire, flood, pestilence, the seven-year locusts, the ice age, the black pox and the double-feature, and as many depressions" and the odds are heavily in favor of their surviving the present world catastrophe. Incidentally, there is the profound observation that, curiously enough, people are the noblest of their lives in time of war—sacrificing, aspiring, working in harmony and unselfishly, dreaming and hoping for a better world, full of heroic high resolve—and, then, when they have peace, security, leisure, they slip back into the old habits of human beings. And yet, says Mr. Wilder, the torch of progress and high aspiration is passed on after each catastrophe through books and the thoughts embodied in them by the philosophers, scientists, poets and artists.

Adam and Eve, the Spelvins and Everyman

This little sermon is unobtrusively preached through three highly comical acts, which give the history of George Antrobus of Excelsior, New Jersey, his wife, his two children and their maid of all work, Lily Sabina. The Antrobuses are Adam and Eve; their son is Cain, and their maid is Lilith. They are also the Spelvins and Everyman—average Americans who have survived, in each of their brief lives, a thousand calamities by the skin of their teeth and have remained "as durable as radiators" and invincibly optimistic.

The show starts with a band from a street corner religious meeting marching down the aisle and setting up ear-splitting music (I'd hate to have been where Mr. Samuel Goldwyn was, only a half a foot away from that trumpet; it was bad enough where I was). Then there are colored slides thrown on a screen in burlesque of the newsreels and the curtain goes up on a stage set of the Antrobus cottage with Miss Bankhead as Tallulah Bankhead in a rougish maid's costume, burlesquing old-time melodrama and repeating her cue lines when nobody shows up to take them. She announces the coming of the ice age (she can see it from the stage window, edging slowly toward the house), then she drops out of character to tell the audience she has been through this play a dozen times and still doesn't know what it's about. When in come an affectionate dinosaur and a baby mammoth. Fredric March phones he has been detained at the office but arrives the next minute dressed for the long winter. Cain has been hitting somebody over the head with a rock again. Homer, Aristotle and some other refugees wander in. A fire is started with two prop sticks of wood in the middle of the living room by a bomb called The Firebringer and Miss Bankhead calls upon the audience to break up their seats and contribute—a request followed by a noise of breakage in the rear of the house and by stooges rushing down to throw the debris on the stage.

It is like that all the way through. In the next act the Antrobuses are at a convention in Atlantic City, where Mr. March suffers one of those urges that are supposed to come over married men every seven years, and asks Miss Eldridge to divorce him so that he can marry Miss Bankhead, whom he has just voted Miss Atlantic City. But Miss Eldridge (who is Mother Eve as well as Mrs. Antrobus) knows how to win him back and tells about her secret in a beautiful speech but never tells the audience what the secret is. In the next act the war is over; the Antrobuses come up out of their air-raid shelter into the collapsed stage set of their bungalow, but Miss Bankhead as the maid again fixes that by pulling guy-ropes like a stage hand. After you have laughed until 11 o'clock Miss Bankhead steps to the footlights and tells you the play is over and you can go home.

The whole cast was excellent, but for Miss Bankhead the evening was a triumph because her part was fatter than that of Mr. March, Miss Eldridge or Florence Reed, each of whom was a delight. In my opinion this is the best play the war is likely to produce. Certainly it is bound to be the most comforting.

"The Skin of Our Teeth"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
November 19, 1942

Tallulah Bankhead and Fredric March Star in New Thornton Wilder Comedy

By JOHN ANDERSON

BY SETTING down the story of the human race in the terms of a sort of cosmic vaudeville, Thornton Wilder has turned out an odd, often provocative, and sometimes richly amusing play called "The Skin of Our Teeth," which was presented at the Plymouth last night by Michael Myerberg. Though Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March and Florence Eldridge are all starred in it, it is Miss Bankhead, as the eternal hussey, who gives it vitality and warmth, and puts humanity into its carefully naive laughter.

This is not only a measure of Miss Bankhead's exuberant performance but a measure of the play itself, since it affords a clue to the disappointment which, in spite of several excellent scenes, makes the play less than satisfying. The plight of the human race if taken ironically ought to produce laughter beyond tears, ought to spring from a valiant humor that rises above tragedy.

Eternal Hope

Yet it seems to me that the fun is too often superficial, that it touches no serious depths of emotion, so that the play fails to reach the wrenching intensity for which its laughter should be a profound release. Mr. Wilder takes a challenging theme and uses it for momentary effects with gadgets that are more theatrical than imaginative. It has a funnypaper inventiveness which finally gets in the way of what Mr. Wilder is trying to say.

What he is trying to say is by no means new, but it is eternally pertinent, since it is forever remembered, and always forgotten. It is the fact that humanity is as indestructible as its hopes, that from the glacial age up to right now, from the invention of the wheel to the perfection of high altitude bombing, man is forever improving himself and eternally falling in ruins, forever building and tearing down, but that somehow, through hell, high water, and, as the playbill says "double-feature movies," he manages to survive.

Heroic Optimism

The terms Mr. Wilder has chosen to express this heroic optimism are clever, immediately challenging, and pictorially effective. Where he transcended space in "Our Town" and made his New England village a simple pattern of the whole world he has here kaleidoscoped time, and in Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, of Excelsior, New Jersey, he has snapshotted the human family of all ages. He has outdone the classical unities by boiling them in Einstein.

Mr. Antrobus, for instance, sends his family a smoke message by telegraph messenger to say that he will be late getting home. He has been delayed at the office creating the multiplication table, separating the letter "m" from "n" in the alphabet and inventing the wheel. His family awaits in terror, for the glaciers have slipped down as far south as Hartford. People are eating grass, and when he gets home Mr. Antrobus is obliged to put the dinosaur and the mammoth out of the house to become extinct in the great freeze.

The Antrobus maid, Sabina, is the first and last strumpet. She is a French farce maid, opening the play with a feather duster. She is Miss Atlantic City 1942 at the convention of mammals. The Antrobus son is firmly called Henry to disguise the fact that he is really Cain, yet even in their moment of deepest dejection and grief they protect Cain, knowing the sorrow he will cause again and again in bathing the earth in blood.

Tragic Core of Play

It is in handling this, the tragic core of the play (since it is the fate humanity must triumph over) that Mr. Wilder seems to me to be too glib to be either searching or truly effective. Though his world is again in smoking ruins, and though Cain is back in the protective shelter of his own house (safe in the heart of the human race) Mr. Antrobus struggles up, clinging to a few printed pages of wisdom—trying to build his dream all over again on the ashes of his perpetual disillusion.

It is a valiant gesture, almost foolhardy in its unflinching purpose, and yet it doesn't hold much stature against the rest of the play, against the careful fantasy and occasional cuteness which Mr. Wilder indulges in for the general tone. It lacks scale, and so misses the exaltation which, however temporary, an audience of Antrobuses has a right to feel for a brief moment, even in their own tear-strewn merriment. We are asked to laugh at the cosmic kick in the pants, without feeling the pain.

Mr. Myerberg has assembled an excellent cast, and Mr. Kazan has directed the players with great energy and perception, with not much more emphasis on the humor than Mr. Wilder has tempted him to. Mr. March plays Mr. Antrobus with deep sincerity and simplicity, so that he becomes a sort of everlasting Mr. Average Citizen. Miss Eldridge is better at the fatuous humors of the eternal housewife (which Mr. Wilder overstresses) than with the rest of it, and Florence Reed provides a vivid and fascinating sketch of a boardwalk fortune teller, whose theory is that telling the future is a cinch compared to the past. Montgomery Clift suggests perfectly the sullen waywardness of the killer in Cain, and Frances Heflin is attractive as the Antrobus daughter. As a distraught stage manager in a small scene Mr. Marshall is extremely amusing.

Bankhead Superb

But it is the Bankhead who gives the proceedings the gusto and broadbeamed humor of a superb performance, who gives the boardwalk scene a bawdy larkishness, and who now and then, in Mr. Wilder's most effective eccentricity, steps out of the part to tell the audience she doesn't think things make much sense. She is irresistibly comic and endlessly entertaining, but when she is out of sight the play sags badly, and loses its fragile atmosphere of sophisticated innocence.

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Skin of Our Teeth"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

A FEW seasons ago Thornton Wilder increased the stature of the theatre with "Our Town," and now that November again lies heavy over Broadway he has done it once more. For in "The Skin of Our Teeth," which Michael Myerberg brought last evening to the Plymouth, he has written a comedy about man which is the best play the Forties have seen in many months, the best pure theatre.

Mr. Wilder is no pedantic philosopher, setting down the laws of the schoolmaster; when he is writing for the theatre he uses all of its arts. His story of man's constant struggle for survival, and his wonderment over why he so struggles, is presented with pathos and broad comedy, with gentle irony and sometimes a sly self-raillery. He does not believe the footlights should separate his players from his audience; his actors now and then step out of their characters to discuss the progress of the play, to comment on what it means or what it does not mean.

* * *

In "The Skin of Our Teeth" the scenery bounces up and down, the players carry on rehearsals, at one point there is a call to the audience to send along its chairs to keep the fire going against the advancing Ice Age. Everywhere in both the dialogue and the properties that surround it are a series of anachronisms, so beautifully blended as to make Excelsior, N. J., quite properly a holdout against the Ice Age, and Atlantic City the point from which the ark took off against the flood.

The first act is Excelsior, and Mr. Antrobus—played by Fredric March—has had a considerable day in town: He has fixed up the alphabet by separating em from en, he has brought the multiplication table up to the hundreds, he has invented the wheel. But in August at Excelsior it is growing colder, so cold the "dogs are sticking to the sidewalk," and obviously the ice is coming down from Vermont. The neighbors come in—Homer, Moses, other—and Mr. Antrobus and his wife, after wondering if it's all worth while, begin cramming their children with knowledge, in the hope they will survive somehow, and can build again on the other side.

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The second act is Atlantic City, at the convention of the Ancient and Honorable Order of Mammals, Subdivision Humans, where Mr. Antrobus, pompous with power and tired of his wife, again almost falls to disaster. The third is at the end of the war—any war—when Mr. Antrobus is properly beaten, but finally decides to start off again. This time the things he sees as reasons are "the voice of the people in their confusion and need," his wife, children and home, knowledge. He goes on, having gotten by only by the skin of his teeth.

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The cast Mr. Myerberg has assembled should always fill Mr. Wilder's plays. First, there is Tallulah Bankhead, in the role of Sabina, who is variously the Antrobus maid, the bathing beauty, the camp follower who has been off to the wars for seven years. Her role is the eternal Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, who wanders off on her own affairs when all is quiet, who comes home and helps out when the going is rough. Miss Bankhead is magnificent—breezy, hard, practical by turns. She can strut and posture in broad comedy, she can be calmly serene. It is she who steps out of character to discuss the play, marvelous interludes all of them.

As Mr. Antrobus, Mr. March is at first the roaring, blustering inventor and amasser of knowledge, bringing home his new wheel with a loud whoop; then the pontifical new president of the Mammals in convention assembled; finally the war-weary and discouraged soldier coming home from battle. Florence Eldridge is Mrs. Antrobus, the mother and home-builder, the steadying influence who, in the Atlantic City period, is out of place, too. Miss Eldridge can be either the steady housekeeper or a Helen Hokinson drawing. Each of the Marches has every reason to be proud of the other.

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And there are others: Montgomery Clift, as Henry, the son, the Henry who used to be called Cain and has a scar on his forehead; and Frances Heflin, as Gladys, daughter of the Antrobuses. There also is Florence Reed as a cynical, surly, contemptuous fortune-teller, and Dickie Van Patten as a telegraph boy and E. G. Marshall as the stage manager, who grows more and more harassed as the evening goes on. Elia Kazan directed in the mood meant by Mr. Wilder, and Albert Johnson has provided the informal settings that tilt and slide as a perfect cover to the play.

As of last evening the theatre was looking up. Definitely.